

Wildlife Diversity News

A Publication of the Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program

Volume 8, Issue 2

Summer 2009

Why Plant Natives?



Great Spangled Fritillary on common milkweed.

Photo by: Josh Otten

We've all heard that we should plant native plants in our flower gardens. But why is that? I mean, it *feels* right and seems to follow the principles of one of Aldo Leopold's most famous quotes, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise"; but why exactly are native plants better?

And the answer, of course, is that it mostly has to do with insects. Native plants attract more bugs than non-natives. In fact alien ornamental plants support 29 times less biodiversity than our native ornamentals, according to Doug Tallamy, Entomology professor at the University of Delaware and author of Bringing Nature Home from Timber Press. Right about now some of you may be gasping in horror thinking about insects eating your garden plants but consider the following:

More insects can often lead to less insect damage to your plants. I know that doesn't at first glance make sense but the more insects you attract, the

more critters that eat insects you attract. This keeps the insect herbivores – those that eat plants – more in balance and can decrease really destructive damage to your plants.

There are also the good insects that we enjoy watching such as butterflies and many moths. Most butterflies and moths utilize plants both as caterpillars and adults, and most are restricted by what plants they can eat - usually native plants. According to Doug Tallamy our native oaks support up to 532 species of caterpillars. Planting natives will help you attract more of these desirable insects.

Attracting more insects to your yard is a great way to feed birds in the summer. Upwards of 90% of terrestrial birds depend on insects for food at some stage during their life. Insects are especially crucial during the nesting season, providing an excellent source of protein and energy for growing nestlings. Even hummingbirds feed them to their young!

There are obviously many other reasons for planting more native plants such as minimizing the surface area of mowed lawn, which increases water conservation and quality (and decreases mow time!), but hopefully providing habitat for wildlife is a good enough answer to the question why. Most life on earth receives its energy either directly or indirectly from plants. The most popular way among wildlife to indirectly receive that energy is by eating insects. So go out there and plant some native plants and welcome the insects that turn up to take advantage of your wildlife habitat.

*- Stephanie Shepherd
Surveys & Data Coordinator*

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Edited by: Jenni Dyar, AmeriCorps

Notes from the Catbird Seat

One of the things that keeps our Wildlife Diversity “engine” running is the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants (SWG) program. This is an appropriation from Congress that is divided up among all 50 states, the District of Columbia, five U.S. territories and a number of Native American tribes. Funding must be appropriated every year, as part of the nation’s larger environmental budget, so that means we must constantly keep asking Congress and the President to include it in their annual budgeting process.

Iowa’s share of SWG averages approximately \$750,000 per year, and this must be matched 1:1 by state or partner funds. Because Iowa DNR has little to spare for match, nearly half of our annual allocation goes to partners as “pass-through” grants. Much of this is for university-based wildlife research that our Wildlife Diversity Program cannot afford to do on our own. In recent years we’ve partnered with Iowa State University for research on forest bird habitat, prairie butterflies, secretive marsh birds, and to conduct inventories

of fish in small streams across the state, to name just a few examples (for more studies, see article on page 7).

We’ve also been fortunate to receive income from the sale of natural resource license plates—the goldfinch, eagle and pheasant designs—that can be used as a match for special projects within the Wildlife Diversity Program. Iowa’s Multi Species Inventory and Monitoring Program has a large portion of federal SWG funds dedicated to it, with the required match coming from our natural resource license plate income.

It’s important to note that all SWG and most of the license plate income must be dedicated to *projects* rather than day-to-day operations and salaries for the Wildlife Diversity staff. SWG is subject to the winds of politics and cannot be assured beyond the current year, so we cannot count on that source as an answer to our staffing needs. In addition, the tight state budget situation has resulted in a hiring freeze, so even if we had the permanent funding necessary we still could not add permanent staff.

There’s light at the distant end of the tunnel, however. Climate change legislation presently moving through Congress includes funding for states to help wildlife adapt to climate change. That legislation has far to go and could be changed considerably along the way. As the bill currently is written, Iowa DNR *could* receive anywhere from \$2 million to \$55 million in new federal funds annually beginning in 2012. There’s also a “Teaming With Wildlife Act,” sponsored by South Dakota Senators Johnson (D) and Thune (R) that could yield approximately \$4 million annually in long-term funding for Iowa’s Wildlife Diversity Program. That legislation also has far to go, but between these two bills under debate, there’s a chance something will eventually emerge to help us fund more wildlife projects and add the staff necessary to do justice to all of wildlife’s needs.

- Doug Harr
Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator

Bald Eagle & Peregrine Falcon Soar from Endangered List

In the May 14th meeting of the Natural Resource Commission, a proposal was put forth to upgrade the status of the bald eagle and peregrine falcon from endangered to species of special concern on the state threatened and endangered species list. The proposal is now open for public comment until July 16, 2009. Any interested person may make written suggestions or comments on the proposed amendments by writing to:

Endangered Species Program
Dept. of Natural Resources
Wallace State Office Building
502 East Ninth Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0034
Fax: (515) 281-6794

Comments may also be submitted by calling the

Endangered Species Program at (515) 281-8524 or by visiting the Endangered Species Program offices on the fourth floor of the Wallace State Office Building. In addition, a public hearing will be held on July 16, 2009, at 10 a.m. in the Fourth Floor East Conference Room, Wallace State Office Building, at which time persons may present views either orally or in writing.



Photo by David Sebben

Special thanks goes out to all the volunteers and landowners who played an important role in documenting the recovery of eagles and peregrines by monitoring and



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reporting nesting activity and allowing access to nests on their property. The recovery and adaptability of these species is truly inspiring and the diversity program for one is thankful these birds have a future here in Iowa!

- Stephanie Shepherd
Surveys & Data Coordinator

White-nose Syndrome Killing Bats

Concerned scientists are searching for solutions to a recently discovered disease affecting bats, White-nose Syndrome (WNS). According to Merlin Tuttle, Founder and Executive Director of Austin-based Bat Conservation International (BCI), this disease is the most devastating threat ever faced by North American bats.

White-nose Syndrome, named for a fungus found on the faces, ears and/or wings of most infected bats, has killed more than a million hibernating bats of six species since it was first detected in a single New York cave in February 2006. Since then, it has spread rapidly across the northeastern states and beyond, reaching as far south as Virginia. This past winter WNS killed up to 95 percent or more of bats in affected hibernation caves and mines.

Two Federally endangered species, Indiana and gray bats, are in imminent peril. Their loss could have serious consequences for the well being of North American ecosystems, agriculture

and human health. These bats are very effective predators of night-flying insects, including many damaging agricultural and forest pests. Many bats, including the WNS-battered little brown bat, eat an average of half their body weight in insects each night from mid-April to mid-October. Tom Kunz (formerly of Iowa), Director of the Center for Ecology and Conservation Biology at Boston University, conservatively estimates that the million bats already lost to WNS would have eaten about 1.39 million pounds of insects each year. Without these bats, crop damage and pesticide use will almost certainly increase.

About 25 of the 46 U.S. bat species use caves or cave-like locations to some extent during winter. In Iowa, four of our nine species of bats commonly hibernate in eastern Iowa caves and mines. These include little brown and big brown bats, Northern myotis, and Eastern pipistrelle. In spring these bats disperse widely, up to 200 miles or more from hibernacula, to roost in buildings,

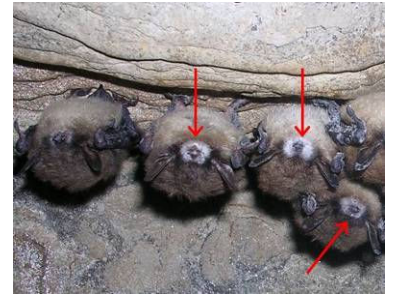


Photo by: Nancy Heaslip, New York Dept. of Environmental Conservation

tree cavities, and beneath loose bark of trees, where they form maternity colonies.

There are still many unanswered questions about this disease, how it is spread, and how it might be stopped. In an effort to stop the transmission of this disease, many eastern U.S. caves already have been closed to the public, and people in Iowa also are discouraged from entering caves or mines that are known to harbor hibernating bats.

(Modified from BCI website.)

- Bruce Ehresman
Avian Ecologist

Wildlife Action Plan News

In 2006, the Iowa Wildlife Action Plan (IWAP) was officially approved by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and it became the guiding document for wildlife conservation in Iowa. Congress requires all states to have a Wildlife Action Plan in order to remain eligible to receive State Wildlife Grants (SWG). The SWG program has brought over \$6 million to the state since its inception in 2001.

Iowa is making steady progress on the implementation of its Action Plan, despite critical funding shortages. In late 2007, I was hired to coordinate IWAP implementation, and in early 2008, an Implementation Committee was formed. Although the responsibility for development of the IWAP was vested in the DNR, the Plan is *not* a DNR plan; it is a statewide plan. Therefore, the Implementation Committee includes representatives from a broad diversity

of entities, from county conservation boards to federal natural resource agencies, non-profit organizations and educational institutions.

The Implementation Committee oversees six working groups to ensure that we are working towards achieving the six major visions laid out in the IWAP. These groups are coordinating their priorities across agencies and organizations, to make the most efficient use of limited funds to enact the plan. In the short term, we are working to accomplish what we can without additional funding. However, substantial increases in funding for natural resources will be required if we are going to be able to accomplish the conservation actions outlined in the IWAP.

There is reason to hope that we may receive funding to enable us to carry out

many of the actions in the plan; there are a number of potential funding streams on the horizon. These include natural resource adaptation funding resulting from a climate change bill which enacts a cap and trade system, the Teaming With Wildlife Act which has been introduced in the Senate, and the upcoming vote in November of 2010 for Sustainable Funding for natural resources in Iowa. Hopefully, in the near future we will be able to bring significant resources to bear on the visions that the Plan depicts for Iowa... an Iowa with clean water, enhanced outdoor recreation opportunities, healthy fish and wildlife populations, and a citizenry that is engaged with the natural world.

- Katy Reeder
Iowa Wildlife Action Plan Manager

(To learn more or to read the IWAP, visit the website listed on page 8 of this newsletter.)

Summer Blockbusters!

Over the course of weeks, things can change right before your eyes. Your once quiet and peaceful neighborhood is suddenly invaded. They come back in search of others and food, vigorously defending territories. You become overwhelmed by the action, but all you can do is watch and wait. Sounds like thrilling summer movie blockbuster, right? Incidentally, I'm not talking about the Decepticons® and Autobots® in the newest *Transformers* movie, but rather the current activities of Iowa's breeding birds!

The 2nd Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) would like to capture this type of behavior during the next four years (2009-2012) to confirm nesting of birds and determine their breeding distributions within the state. With this information, we will be able to determine what may be causing decline in species' populations and fight for conservation of Iowa's birdlife. This is a large project, and we need your help!

This summer, there are three "Blockbusting" weekends to help us move forward in our surveying efforts. The purpose of a Blockbusting weekend is to visit areas in the state where not

much surveying has occurred so far. By participating in these weekends, you will get the opportunity to observe bird behavior first hand, visit places you've never been, meet new people (or reunite with some old friends), and partake in one of Iowa's largest and most extensive bird surveys. Not a bad way to spend a weekend!

The first Blockbusting weekend was held at Viking Lake State Park in Montgomery County on June 5-7. Despite the rainy weather and low number of volunteers, eight blocks were surveyed that had no breeding data recorded previously.

We have two more Blockbusting weekends left, and we need all of the help we can get. Whether you are a casual birdwatcher or a die-hard lister, being a volunteer with the BBA is guaranteed to be a fun and exciting experience for everyone. You don't need to be an expert birder. All birds need to be recorded, from American Robins and European Starlings to Brown Creepers and Blue Grosbeaks!

The upcoming Blockbusting weekends are:

June 26-28
Spirit Lake/Okobojo area
Dickinson County

July 17-19
Backbone State Park
Delaware County

If you are interested in helping out, or would like more information about these weekends, please contact the BBA Coordinator using the information listed below. There is no time commitment for the weekend, so if you can only come for a few hours, or would like to help all weekend, your assistance would be greatly appreciated!

- Nichole Nagl
BBA Volunteer Coordinator
(515) 432-2823 ext. 117
Cell: (515) 298-3072
bbacoordinator@iowabirds.org

For more information and to join the effort, go to:

<http://bba.iowabirds.org/>

Bumper Crop of Peregrines?

This year we have documented 13 peregrine falcon eyries around the state. We are still waiting to see how many of the nests have been successful and the number of young fledged, but we've had a few reports already. US Bank building in Cedar Rapids has one young this year. There are two young in Davenport at Mid American Energy headquarters. There are three young at a Lansing cliff-site. Four sites have four young that will be fledging soon: MidAmerican Energy Louisa Generating Station near Muscatine, Alliant Energy Chillicothe Generating Station near Ottumwa, American Republic Insurance in Des Moines and the State Capitol.

There will be a public falcon event on the east side of the Capitol at 11am on Wednesday, June 24. Speakers will be celebrating the rejuvenated falcon population in Iowa. The goal of five nesting pairs with as many as ten territories has been maintained in Iowa since 2004. This program is timed to hopefully coincide with any fledgling falcons taking their first flights from their nesting ledge. With the four young and two adults downtown and the same at the Capitol, falcon enthusiasts could enjoy as many as a dozen falcons over Des Moines in the coming weeks. They will not "darken the skies" with their numbers, but incredible aerial displays of their flying prowess are sure to occur.



The four young falcons at the State Capitol building check out their surroundings. Soon they will be taking their first flight.

- Pat Schlarbaum
Wildlife Diversity Technician II

Makoke Birding Trail Unveiled

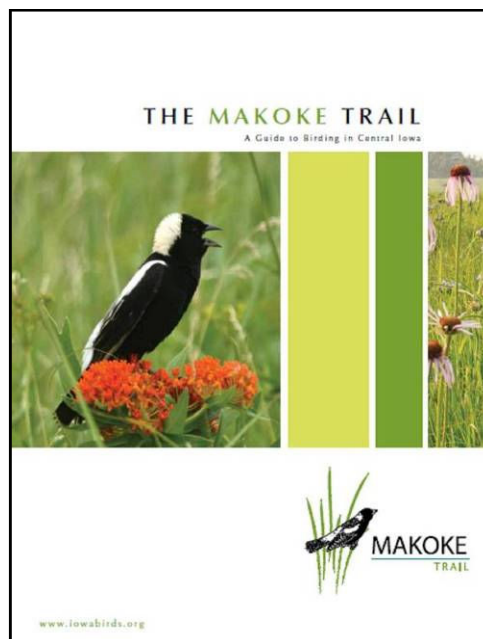
We're very excited to announce the creation of a new "birding trail" in central Iowa. Named the *Makoke Trail* (an Ioway native language word meaning "bird"), and featuring a beautiful new guidebook, this development should help attract more attention to our wealth of birdlife and could even serve as a tourism attraction for central Iowa.

This project is the culmination of more than two years' work by a team of birders from Iowa DNR, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Polk County Conservation Board. Funding or in-kind services and materials were provided by each major partner, plus cash contributions from Iowa Audubon, Des Moines Audubon, Pheasants Forever, Central Iowa Sierra Club and the Jasper, Madison and Warren County Conservation Boards.

The birding trail concept originated a decade ago with creation of the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, and they've been growing by leaps and bounds ever since. It's estimated there may be 300-400 such trails now scattered across North America. These are not "trails" in

the traditional sense. Instead, most consist of a number of top birdwatching sites across a region—sometimes an entire state—linked by roads or a common theme. Birders drive to sites of their choice along the trail, stopping at prime viewing areas or to hike real trails in search of local specialty birds. Our new Makoke Trail joins three other well-established Iowa trails: Siouxland (Loess Hills), Iowa Prairie Lakes Region, and Audubon Great River (Mississippi) birding trails.

Among Iowa's birding trails, Makoke is unique for several reasons. The new trail guide is in magazine format, rather than a fold-out map. Also, each of the 22 major sites features a high quality aerial photo with boundaries, major roads, and viewing area symbols superimposed. Each site has a full description of habitats and features, best times of year to visit, birds to look for and notes on birding the area. Additionally, all sites will be posted with special signs featuring the trail's new Bobolink logo and Makoke name, along with the familiar "Watchable Wildlife Area" brown-and-white binoculars emblem, so that visitors will recognize they have reached the correct viewing spot. While the 22 featured sites certainly do not cover *all* of central Iowa's best birding areas, they serve as prime representatives for the region's rich birding opportunities.



Trail guides are available from central Iowa offices of most of the major partner agencies, including the Visitor Centers for Saylorville Lake, Red Rock Lake and Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. Grab your binoculars and go birding!

- Doug Harr

Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator



Each of the 22 Makoke Trail sites will be marked with both a Makoke Trail and a Watchable Wildlife sign.



Support conservation
in Iowa.

Species Spotlight: Poweshiek Skipperling

Spotting a butterfly is a sure sign that summer has arrived. Not every species, however, is as large or showy as a monarch or a tiger swallowtail. Some species fly under the radar, so to speak, of the casual observer; the Poweshiek skipperling (also known as the Poweshiek skipper) is one such species.

With a wingspan of about an inch, it is an easy butterfly to miss. Its coloration is mostly dark brown, with a golden forewing edge (see photo, below). When viewed from the side (see photo, right), you can see the distinctive white veins on the underside of the hind wing.



Photo by: Mike Reese, wisconsinbutterflies.org

You can find the Poweshiek skipperling flying between mid-June and the end of July in better-quality wet-mesic and dry tallgrass prairie in the upper two tiers of counties in Iowa, as well as in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Dakotas. It can often be seen sitting on one of its favorite plants - purple coneflower, ox-eye, black-eyed susan, or pale-spike lobelia.

Eggs are often attached to a host plant (most likely prairie dropseed), which the larva will eat after hatching in mid-July. For the rest of the summer and into the fall, the larva will grow and molt four times before overwintering in leaf litter as a 5th instar. Once spring returns, the caterpillar will continue growing and molting until it is ready to form a chrysalis.

First collected and described in Grinnell in 1870, the Poweshiek skipperling is named after the county in which it was found. Because it requires relatively pristine prairie and is not tolerant of frequent disturbances (e.g., cattle grazing or regular annual haying), it is a state-threatened species. Adults do not migrate, making it difficult for the



Photo by: Mike Reese, wisconsinbutterflies.org

species to recolonize restored prairie areas that are not adjacent to current Poweshiek skipperling habitat.

Iowa DNR is currently working to develop a recovery plan for the Poweshiek skipperling, to bring this butterfly back into some of its historic range. You can help by keeping an eye out for this little prairie specialist!

- Jenni Dyar, AmeriCorps
Wildlife Diversity Research Assistant

Osprey are Back Again!

14 osprey pairs have been reported around Iowa this year. Young are still hatching this week, and here's what we know so far: Iowans are increasingly excited about seeing ospreys! Macbride Raptor Project staff reported four nesting pairs around Coralville Reservoir. There are four pairs around the Cedar Falls/Waterloo area, two pairs in Polk Co, a nesting pair at Don Williams Lake in Boone Co, and a nesting pair at the Duane Arnold Energy Plant at Wickiup Hill in Linn Co. There are also nesting pairs again this year in Woodbury Co along Missouri River and at Lake Rathbun in Appanoose Co. Thanks to all the County Conservation Boards and their staff for reporting their osprey pairs!

20 young osprey from Wisconsin and Minnesota will be released at four sites throughout the state this summer. Sites include White Rock Conservancy in Guthrie Co, Mud Lake on the Mississippi River in Dubuque Co, Spirit Lake, and a new site at Annett Nature Center in Warren Co. Birds will be

arriving in mid-July, so watch for announcements of those upcoming events. Also AmeriCorps volunteer projects are planned for kids to go "fishing for osprey" to provide fish for the young ospreys to live on while they develop flight skills before release. Those kids can go thru life remembering - "it was our job that day to go fishing!"



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- Pat Schlarbaum
Wildlife Diversity Technician II

WDP-funded Research Projects

In addition to providing crucial funding for programs such as the Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring Project, the Wildlife Action Plan Implementation Project, and the Habitat Enhancement for Species of Greatest Conservation Need Project, we make some of the SWG money available to partner organizations for research projects on species of greatest conservation need through a competitive grant process.

We plan to fund two projects with SWG money this year:

- Dr. Michael Quist at Iowa State University: "Fish Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Iowa's Non-wadeable Rivers: Distribution, Relative Abundance, and Relations with Instream Habitat and Potential Movement Barriers"
- Matthew Fisher of The Nature Conservancy: "Implementing Adaptive Management for Improving Herpetofaunal Habitat within the Nature Conservancy's Maytag Preserve"

Iowa State University's project will fund a Masters student, while a large portion of the TNC project will be conducted by

undergraduates enrolled in TNC's Anna Beal Intern Program.

We also have funded small research projects for many years. This money currently comes from the sale of the REAP license plates and funds 4 projects. This year those projects were:

- Torre Hovick and Dr. James Miller at Iowa State University: "Determining Post-Fledging Survival and Habitat Use in Grasshopper Sparrows"
- Dr. Theresa Spradling at the University of Northern Iowa: "Conservation Genetics of the Central Newt in Iowa"
- Dr. James Stroh and Dr. William Heyborne of Morningside College: "Survey of Small Mammals and Reptiles of the Sylvan Runkel State Preserve and the Loess Hills WMA"
- Irma Tapia, Dr. Sue Fairbanks, and Dr. Julie Blanchong at Iowa State

University: "Genetic Diversity and Connectivity of White-tailed Jackrabbit Populations in Iowa with Notes on Seasonal Home Ranges"

If you are interested in applying to one of these programs, please check the website this August. Proposals for the small grants program will be due December 15, 2009. We are considering a pre-proposal step for the State Wildlife Grant proposals, which would affect the due date for each step (pre-proposal and a full proposal for selected projects).

None of these projects would happen without your support of our program through your participation in Teaming with Wildlife and the purchase of the Natural Resource (REAP) license plates. Thank you so much!

- Karen Kinkead
Monitoring & Research Biologist

For more information or to apply for a grant, go to:

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/diversity/grants.html>



Grasshopper Sparrow
Photo by: Len Blumin



Central Newt
Photo by: Jeff LeClere



White-tailed Jackrabbit
Photo by: Bob Gress



Iowa's Teaming With Wildlife Coalition
Over 230 groups working together to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered.

Last Look

Eastern gray tree frogs are one of the species you can hear during a Frog & Toad Call Survey. By inflating vocal sacs under the throat, males are able to amplify the sound of their call, allowing them to be heard from a greater distance. To learn about volunteering for a Frog & Toad Call Survey, go to: http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/diversity/frog_toad.html

Photo by: Ronald Moore



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Events Calendar

Friday, June 26-Sunday, June 28 Dickinson County BBA Blockbusting Weekend

Where: Spirit Lake/Okoboji area
*Come for a few hours or the whole weekend!

Saturday, June 27-Sunday, June 28 Dewey's Pasture Bioblitz

Where: Dewey's Pasture Bird Conservation Area, Clay & Palo Alto Counties
*For more information, go to:
www.paccb.org/Program%20&%20Events1.htm

Friday, July 17-Sunday, July 19 Delaware County BBA Blockbusting Weekend

Where: Backbone State Park
*Come for a few hours or the whole weekend!

Thursday, Aug. 6: 1:30pm Lower Morse Lake Bird Conservation Area Dedication

Where: Wright County Conservation Board, 1768 O'Brien Ave, Lake Cornelia

Saturday, Aug. 8-Sunday, Aug. 9 Whiterock Conservancy Bioblitz

Where: Whiterock Conservancy, Coon Rapids, Guthrie County
*For more info and to register, contact Elizabeth Hill at (712) 684-2697 ext. 114 or Elizabeth@whiterockconservancy.org

Thursday, Aug. 13-Sunday, Aug. 23 Iowa State Fair

Where: fairgrounds, Des Moines
*Make sure to visit the DNR exhibits, located near the west gate at E Grand & 30th St!

To learn more about the Iowa Wildlife Action Plan, go to:
<http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/diversity/plan.html>

Federal regulations prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex or disability. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Director, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Building, 502 E. Ninth Ave., Des Moines, IA 50319-0034, or the Equal Opportunity Commission, Washington, DC 20240.